ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 6/25/65	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ACCESSION NO.	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW
ED000163	8001	N.A.	

4. AUTHOR(S):
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5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
The Relation Between Personal Factors and Opinions Regarding Conduct Regulations in a Sample of Pennsylvania State University

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
Pennsylvania State Review of Educational Research

7. EDITOR

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN.
ORG. Penn State Univ. University Park, Pa.
ST.
CITY, STATE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
The Penn State Univ.

10.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
	13-14	Nov. 57	2

TELE. EXT
INST/LOC CODE

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TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. CODING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR experimental study and abstract of doctoral dissertation

16. KEYWORDING TERMS (8-12)

ADDITIONAL	personal factors	undergraduate education		
experimental studies	opinions	backgrounds		
	behavior	discipline		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

The purposes of this study were to determine the nature of the opinions of undergraduate students regarding the relative censure they would place on students violating university conduct regulations, and whether statistically significant differences existed in the degree of censure placed in relation to selected personal background factors.

ERIC No. OF ABSTRACT

18. FUNDING DATA

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Fo

Penn State Review of Educational Research
Vol IX, No 1, Nov 1957

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THE RELATION BETWEEN PERSONAL FACTORS AND OPINIONS REGARDING CONDUCT SITUATIONS IN A SAMPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

- Bernard A. Hodinko

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
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Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the nature of the opinions of undergraduate students at The Pennsylvania State University with respect to the relative censure they would place on students committing certain violations of University conduct regulations; and to determine if statistically significant differences existed in the degree of censure which undergraduate students, according to selected personal background factors, would place on students committing these rule infractions.

Procedure

The general plan of this research called for the development of two instruments, The Student Opinionnaire and The Personal Data Inventory, to elicit responses of the 520 undergraduate students in the study population. A preliminary study involving 120 students was conducted to obtain insights into the face validity of the instruments and to determine the items to be included on each. In each study, both instruments were administered to students in their place of college residence by the investigator. Responses were tabulated and presented through forty-five tables reporting the percentage of students indicating various disciplinary actions for each of seventeen conduct situations. The chi square technique was used to test the significance of the differences in the distribution of opinions between students of various status classifications as well as between situations.

Limitations

The study was limited to data collected through instruments which were specifically structured for students in residence at The Pennsylvania State University during the Fall semester of the 1956-57 academic year. Hence, the conclusions drawn are likewise specifically related to The Pennsylvania State University and the period during which the study was conducted.

Major Findings and Conclusions

In the opinion of students, standards which severely condemn acts of theft for the material value of an article and cheating involving collusion were most appropriate. On the other hand, student opinion was indicative of little support of strong policies against the use of alcoholic beverages.

Men were considerably more critical of acts involving cheating, property destruction, or theft than women, but more approbative of conduct involving the misuse of alcoholic beverages or sexual promiscuity.

An increase in age seemed to have a liberalizing influence on student opinions about the seriousness of most of the seventeen acts of misbehavior considered.

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The opinions of students distinguished by college class revealed milder censure of sexual promiscuity and rule infractions resulting from college foolery by the upperclassmen, as contrasted with the lowerclassmen.

Generally speaking, fraternity men expressed much milder censure of the entire set of seventeen conduct situations than did non-fraternity respondents. Inspection of opinion differences between their sister groups, sorority and non-sorority, on the overall set of conduct situations, however, disclosed that sorority women reacted toward the rule infractions in question with slightly more strictness.

Although the responses of Catholics, on the whole, were more tolerant in nature than those of Protestants toward two incidents regarding the misuse of alcoholic beverages, the opinions of these groups did not vary widely on the seriousness of the other conduct situations for which they were compared.

Implications

From the findings in this study, it is suggested that students, grouped according to certain personal data, differ in their views on the importance of many campus behavior problems. Student perception of several issues is different between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen, fraternity and non-fraternity men, and sorority and non-sorority women. Insights as to the nature of many of these differences were provided through this work and are hoped to have implications for college personnel concerning control of student behavior, and in bringing students and the school administration to a closer understanding regarding campus conduct standards.

The findings of this investigation may have wider implications for those who direct University instructional programs. The wide differences in opinion found between men and women, for example, concerning their regard of the seriousness of acts of theft, mususe of alcoholic beverages, and sexual promiscuity suggest moral discrepancies which need more attention in college educational programs.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. A survey of the attitudes of administrators, faculty members, and parents of University students toward the behavior issues studied in this investigation should be made to provide insights into the extent the campus behavior code should be formalized or relaxed if either.

2. Tools and techniques that could be utilized in identifying and correcting or improving student opinion and behavior regarding campus behavior issues should be investigated.

3. An investigation of peer culture and the extent of its pressures on students for conformity to the dominate concerns and standards of various campus groups should be made. Information of this nature would enable college personnel to better understand and deal more effectively with student social problems.

4. A study of the sources of campus traditions and folkways would be of value to college personnel in devising ways to initiate new customs as well as to nurture those which are contributing to constructive social control on campus.